



Focused COVID-19 Media Monitoring, Nepal



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-Sharpening the COVID-19 Response through Communications Intelligence

Date: July 29, 2021
Kathmandu, Nepal

EMERGING THEME(S)

- Nepal reported 3,840 new COVID-19 cases, 33 deaths on July 28; Taplejung Hospital seeing increasing number of patients needing hospitalization, management of crowd has become difficult; Hilihang's Gopetar Primary Health Center without a doctor for the last 2 years; Damak under 7-day complete lockdown to curb spread of COVID-19 infection; Health Ministry says lax attitude of the public towards health safety protocols to blame for the recent rise in infections
- Third wave of COVID-19 pandemic projected to hit country within 7 weeks, but some Health Ministry officials believe it will be sooner; children and the unvaccinated will be the most vulnerable population then
- COVID-19 vaccine 99 per cent effective in protecting one from the Delta variant, according to India's National Institute of Virology study
- Salyan's Chhatreswori Rural Municipality holding alternative classes as COVID-19 risk has ruled out physical classes; Parsa schools see a digital divide — students studying in community schools deprived from getting education; parents worried about children's mental health as schools remain shut for more than 3 months now

RECURRING THEME(S)

- Delta Plus variant of COVID-19 detected in 3 out of 47 samples sent for gene sequencing
- Fever that has gripped Parsa confirmed to be Influenza-A; not all showing COVID-19-like symptoms have the virus, it could be malaria, dengue, scrub typhus, say health experts

¹ This intelligence is tracked through manually monitoring national print, digital and online media through a representative sample selection, and consultations with media persons and media influencers.

ISSUE(S) IN FOCUS

Nepal saw as many as 3,840 coronavirus infections on July 28 taking the coronavirus caseload to 688,307, as per the Ministry of Health and Population's records. The countrywide COVID-19 mortality toll increased to 9,791 with 33 more fatalities. Nepal's COVID-19 recovery rate stands at 94.3 per cent and the fatality rate stands 1.5 per cent. The country's active COVID-19 case count currently is 29,444 as opposed to 28,836 on July 27.²

The District Hospital in Taplejung has been seeing an increase in the number of patients needing hospitalization in the last week. Dr Sonim Lama, Chief at the hospital, said the 15-bed hospital is already filled to its capacity and may not be able to take in more patients in the coming days. Currently over 40 patients are undergoing treatment at the hospital — most of the wards are occupied with patients of COVID-19 and other illnesses, according to Dr Lama.³

The increase in the number of patients at the District Hospital of Taplejung has made management of the crowd difficult. The stakeholders however have pointed out that the increase in number of patients means the risk of the spread of COVID-19 infection and thus there should be a plan for the management of the crowd.⁴

It has been over two years since the doctor deployed at the Gopetar Primary Health Center at Hilihang Rural Municipality-3 of Panchthar has been on study leave. No one else was appointed during that duration and the health center was made into a COVID-19 hospital despite not having any doctor. The Rural Municipality appointed a doctor there towards the end of the first wave of COVID-19 pandemic, but the doctor left within three months. The health center is once again left without a doctor.⁵

The Damak Municipality of Jhapa is in a seven-day complete lockdown due to the spread of COVID-19 infections. According to Mayor Ramnath Oli, it opted for a strict lockdown after the number of COVID-19 infected people increased in Jhapa district.⁶

The lax attitude in following public health protocols set by the government has led to the increase in COVID-19 infections. On July 17, a total of 1,875 cases of COVID-19 infection were recorded in the country. It rose to more than double in 10 days

² THT Online

³ The Kathmandu Post

⁴ Nagarik

⁵ Setopati

⁶ Baarhakhari

on July 27. The highest number of infections has been seen in Province 1. The crowds in the markets make it feel like there is no COVID-19 infection, while public health protocols have not been followed in public vehicles. Political parties and different groups have continued with their protest and demonstration programs. The infection has increased due to the carelessness in the following of public health protocols with the relaxation in the prohibitory orders, according to the Ministry of Health and Population.⁷

The number of daily COVID-19 infections has been rising with the relaxations in prohibitory orders. Public health experts, epidemiologists, virologists as well as officials at the Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP) have warned that a third wave of the pandemic is inevitable. Going by the number of daily infections in the last few days, it may not be long before the third wave. “The MoHP data of the infected persons of the last two weeks indicates that the coronavirus is spreading rapidly once again,” Dr Krishhna Man Shakya, a public health expert, said. “It seems that the chain of infections broken when widespread prohibitory orders were in place has been joined again. On July 16, an MoHP official told the Education and Health Committee of the parliament that a third wave of the infections will hit the country in seven weeks. However, if other MoHP officials are to be believed, it will be sooner than that — the present situation regarding the case numbers is similar to the one in the third week of April.⁸

The government has said children will be at high risk during the third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic as the vaccine for them is not ready and hence have not been vaccinated. Along with children, those who have not been vaccinated will get serious infection, it added.⁹

A study by the National Institute of Virology of India has shown that the COVID-19 vaccine will protect one up to 99 per cent from the Delta variant of COVID-19. Only 9.8 per cent infected with COVID-19 needed hospitalization, while only 0.4 per cent lost their lives due to the infection, as per the study. The only alternative to be safe from the COVID-19 infection and its complications is the vaccine, the study has shown.¹⁰

Community schools in Chhatreswori Rural Municipality, Salyan have started conducting alternative classes since the resumption of physical classes amid the risk of a third wave of COVID-19 is not an option. According to Keshar Oli, Education

⁷ Kantipur

⁸ The Kathmandu Post

⁹ Baarhakhari

¹⁰ Kantipur

Unit Chief of the local unit, several community schools in the local unit have started alternative classes since last week. Fifteen community schools have been conducting online classes for the students of grades four to 10. The local unit has distributed 'Pathshala SIM' provided for free by Nepal Telecom to community school children. According to Oli, the local unit bears the cost of recharging the SIM for students.¹¹

The schools in Parsa have remained closed since the imposition of the prohibitory orders on April 29. While the private schools have been running online classes, only a few community schools have been able to do so, depriving the majority of students from such schools from getting education. As such, the demands to resume classes safely are being made from local levels.¹²

It has been nearly three months since schools across the country have been shut down. The guardians are worried that the children might suffer from mental illnesses as they have been confined inside their homes for a long time. However, public health experts have said that as the risk of COVID-19 infection is still there, we should not hurry about opening schools to run physical classes.¹³

The new cases of mutation of Delta variant have been confirmed in Nepal again. Out of 47 samples tested, the mutation, Delta Plus, was confirmed in three samples, according to the Ministry of Health and Population.¹⁴

The Delta variant of COVID-19 has been confirmed in the gene sequencing done in all samples. According to the Ministry of Health and Population, all 47 samples tested were found to be infected with the Delta variant. The mutation — K.4.1.7. N — was confirmed in three cases.¹⁵

It has been confirmed that the fever that spread in Parsa in the past one week has caused Influenza-A. After the increase in the pressure of the patients showing symptoms similar to that of COVID-19 in the hospitals and clinics of Birgunj, their swab tests had been sent to Teku Hospital for testing and it was confirmed that it is Influenza-A.¹⁶

¹¹ The Kathmandu Post

¹² Onlinekhabar

¹³ Onlinekhabar

¹⁴ Nayapatrika

¹⁵ Nagarik

Most people suspect it is a case of COVID-19 infection if one suffers from fever, breathing difficulties, body ache among others. However, these could be the symptoms of other diseases like malaria, dengue, and scrub typhus among others that are seen during the rainy season, as per public health experts.¹⁷

OTHER(S)

National News

The Education and Health Committee of the House of Representatives has advised the government to give the COVID-19 vaccine to Class 12 students before their exams, which are scheduled to begin from August 15.¹⁸

The Education and Health Committee of the House of Representatives has instructed the government to keep healthcare professionals in the exam centers of Class 12. The instruction was made keeping in mind the risk of COVID-19 infection.¹⁹

The exams of Class 12 will be taken from home centers due to the risk of the COVID-19 infection, according to Durga Aryal, Member Secretary at the National Education Board.²⁰

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba has requested the United States for additional doses of COVID-19 vaccine. He made the request in a telephonic conversation with the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.²¹

Dr Shyam Raj Upreti, Coordinator of the Vaccine Advisory Committee of the Ministry of Health and Population, informed that all eligible population will get the COVID-19 vaccine within the fiscal year 078/079. As per this plan, a total of 21,700,000

¹⁶ Kantipur

¹⁷ Nayapatrika

¹⁸ Onlinekhabar

¹⁹ Onlinekhabar

²⁰ Onlinekhabar

²¹ Kantipur

population above the age of 18 will get vaccinated.²²

Two non-teaching staff, wrongly recommended by a school of Ilam as teachers, have taken the COVID-19 vaccine. According to Ramanta Poudel, Health Division Chief of Ilam Municipality, if such recommendations are made, then the vaccine will not be sufficient for the target population.²³

More than 200,000 Nepalis from the Sudurpaschim Province, who had gone to India for employment opportunities, had returned to Nepal in recent days due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, they have again started going back to India in search of jobs as they fear they will die of hunger rather than the disease. They have said they are compelled to return to India amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁴

International News

The Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan has fully vaccinated 90 per cent of its eligible adult population within just seven days, its health ministry said. The country began giving out second doses on July 20 in a mass drive that has been hailed by UNICEF as “arguably the fastest vaccination campaign to be executed during a pandemic”.²⁵

Cambodian authorities stopped five large containers of water buffalo meat imported from India after determining the shipment was tainted with the coronavirus, officials said on July 27.²⁶

The British government said on July 27 it will ease coronavirus quarantine rules for thousands more essential workers in an attempt to end staff shortages that are hobbling parts of the economy.²⁷

²² Nagarik

²³ Nagarik

²⁴ Onlinekhabar

²⁵ The Associated Press (in The Himalayan Times)

²⁶ The Associated Press (in The Himalayan Times)

²⁷ The Associated Press (in The Himalayan Times)

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